Relationships between tensile and fracture mechanics properties and fatigue properties of large plastic mold steel

Relationships between Tensile and Fracture Mechanics Properties and Fatigue Properties of Large Plastic Mold Steel

D. Firrao[1], P. Matteis[1], G. Scavino[1], G. Ubertalli[1],
M. G. Ienco[2], M. R. Pinasco[2], E. Stagno[2], R. Gerosa[3],
B. Rivolta[3], A. Silvestri[3], G. Silva[3], A. Ghidini[4]

[1]Politecnico di Torino [2]Università di Genova
[3]Politecnico di Milano [4]Lucchini Sidermeccanica

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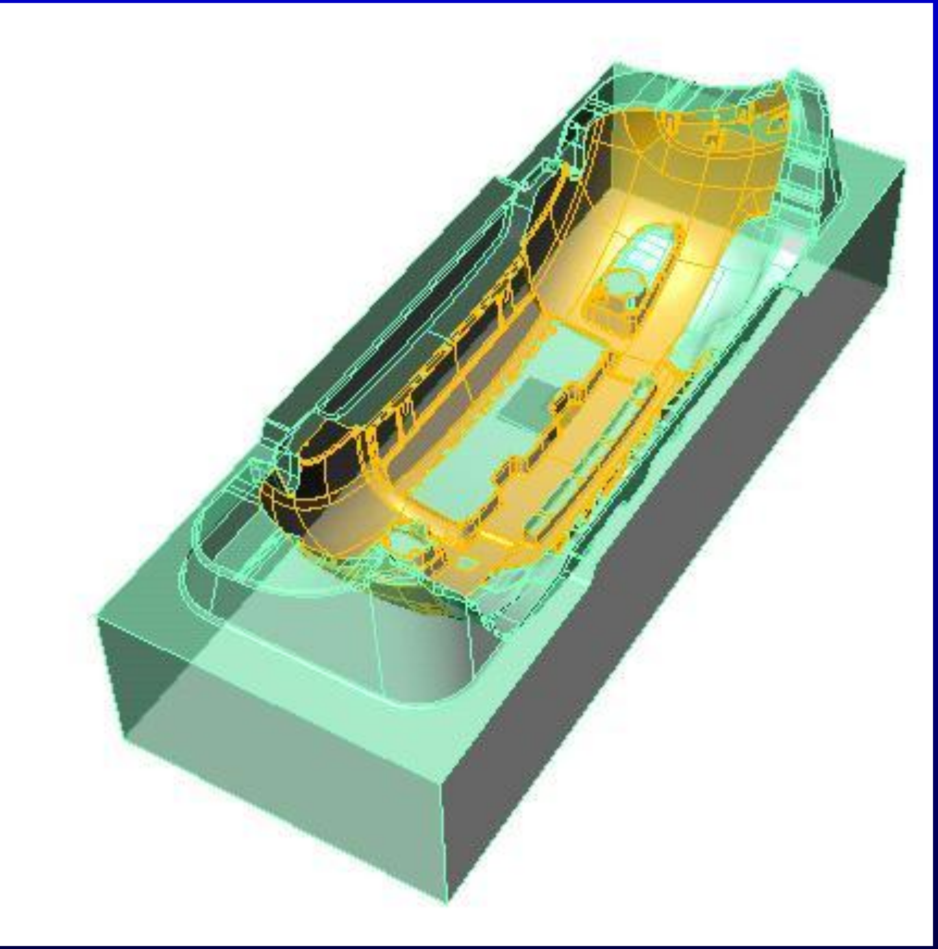
Overall views of a bumper mould.



Summary

- Production cycle and critical issues of large plastic moulds
- Sampling pattern and re-heat-treatments
- As-received microstructures
- Mechanical properties and fatigue behaviour of as-received and re-heat-treated steel
- Fracture surfaces
- Conclusions

Plastic molds machined from 1x1x2 m forged and *pre-hardened* steel blooms

Applications

- ***automotive components (bumpers, dashboards, …)***

Stresses

- ***applied stresses:***
  - injection pressure
  - thermal gradients
  - notch effects
  - wear by reinforced resins flow
  - fatigue (millions of pieces)
- ***stresses raised by:***
  - cracks (improper weld bed depositions),
  - abnormal operations (incomplete extraction).

- *Experience-based design, no usual defect-allowance calculation procedure*
- *Reported macroscopically brittle in-service failures*

- *different microstructures expected at increasing depths after quench*
- *any microstructure could be found at mold face*

Usual Production cycle (I)

- ***Steel composition***

	C	Cr	Mn	Ni	Mo	Si	S	P
1.2738 40CrMnNiMo8-6-4	0.35 - 0.45	1.8 - 2.1	1.3 - 1.6	0.9 - 1.2	0.15 - 0.25	0.2 - 0.4	<0.03	<0.03
Examined bloom	0.42	2.0	1.5	1.1	0.21	0,37	0.002	0.006

- ***Steel mill operations***

  ingot casting (ESR refining is not possible)
  forging to 1x1 m sections
  dehydrogenization
  oil quenching
  tempering (one or more stages)

Usual Production cycle (II)

- ***Commercial warehouse operations***

  removal of rough and decarburized surfaces (up to 10-20 mm)

  sawing to requested dimensions

- ***Mold machining shop operations***

  chip-removal and/or electrical-discharge machining to the mold shape grinding with or without polishing in selected areas

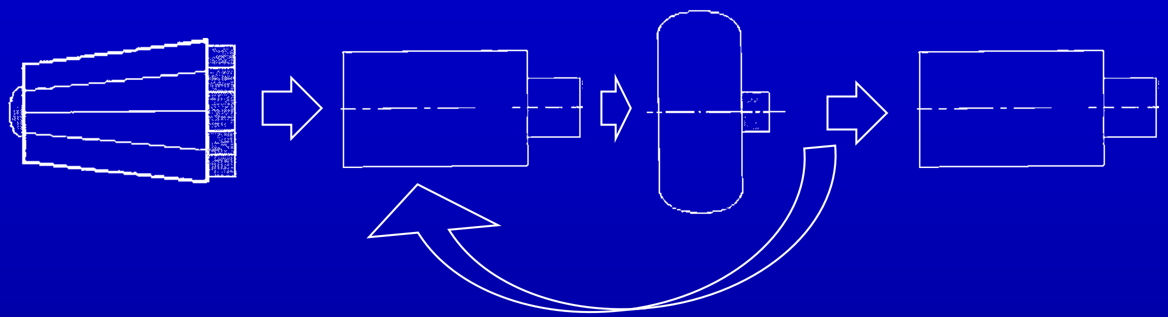
  local surface treatments

  eventual corrections using weld bed depositions

Usual Production cycle (cont.)

Forging

- comparable ingot and bloom section
- some repeated forging steps

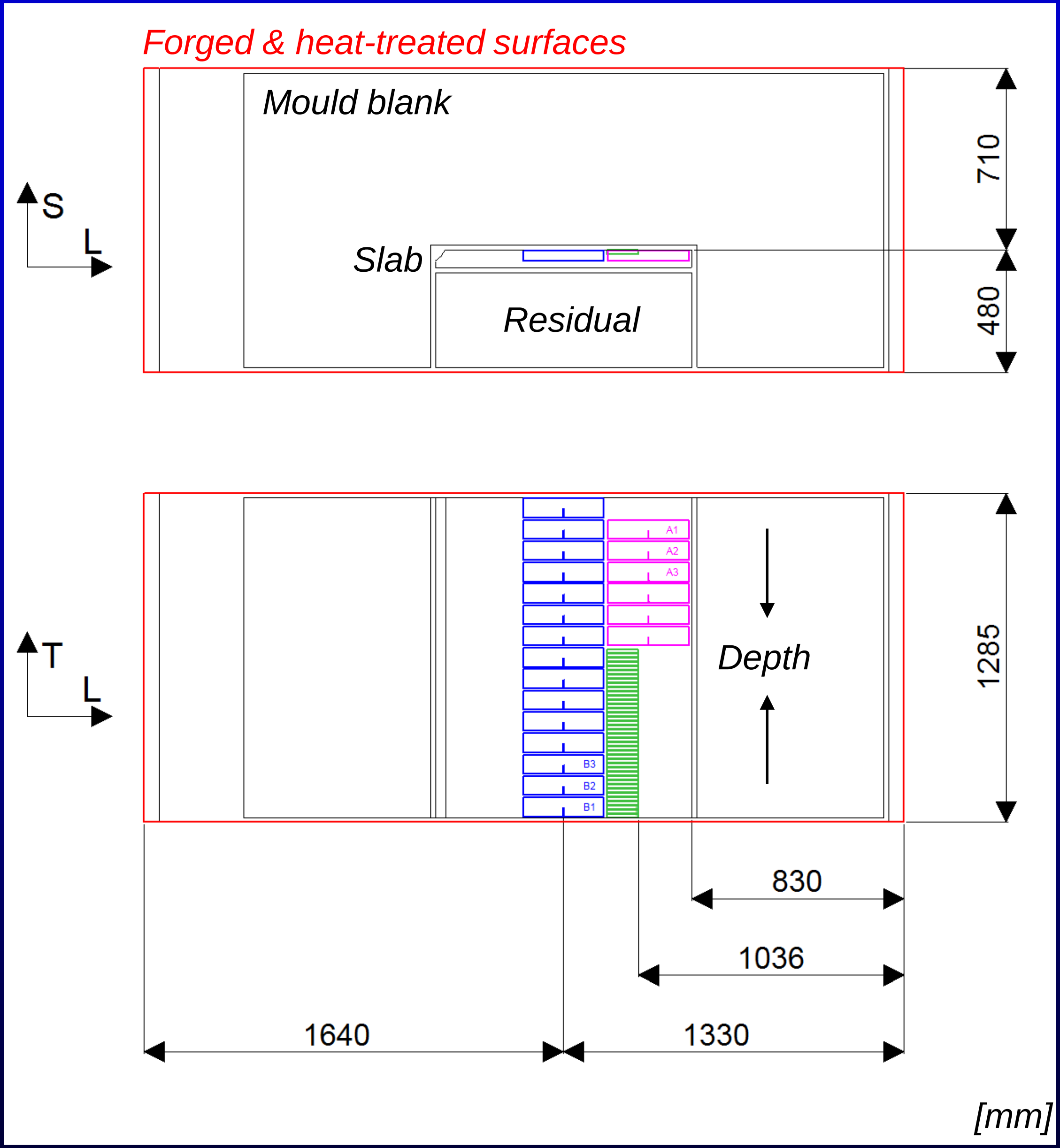


- total reduction ratio much lower than in rolling (and not comparable)

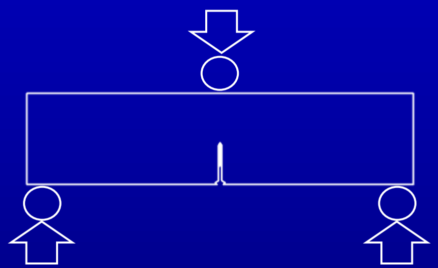
Heat treating in air

Step	Temperature	Duration
hydrogen removal		a few days
austenitizing	840-880°C	1-2 days
oil quench	-	-
tempering to 330-300 HB (one or more stages)	550-600°C	1-2 days (each stage)

Experimental (I): sampling of the original bloom



12x18 mm section blanks



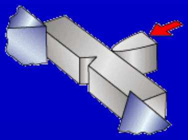
38 mm thick K_{IC} specimens (LT)

As-received

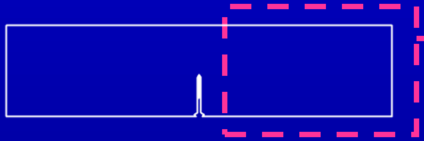
Individually re-heat-treated

Experimental (II): sampling pattern & re-heat-treatments

Blanks

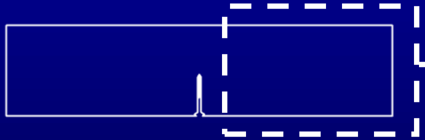
- Round tensile specs. (L) 
- Metallographic samples
- Re-heat-treated Charpy-V specs. (LT) 

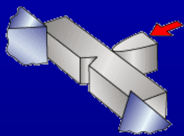
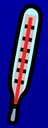
38 mm re-heat-treated K_{IC} specs.



-  Round tensile specs. (L)

38 mm as-received K_{IC} specs.

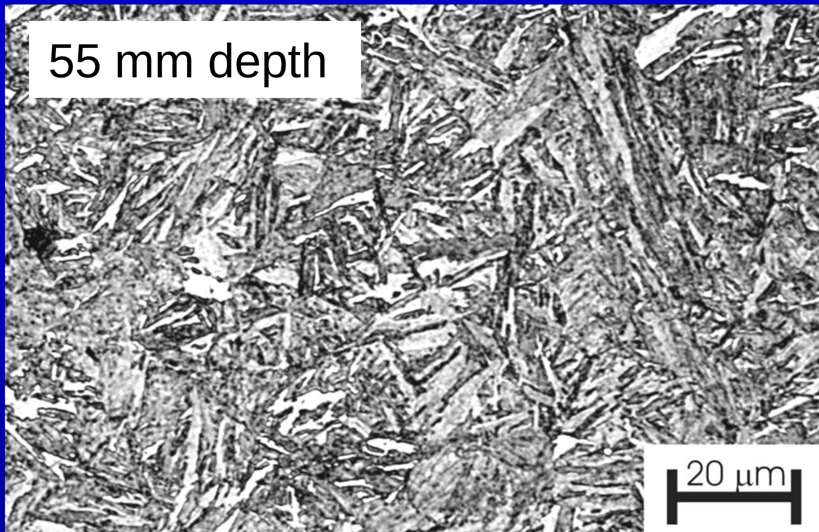


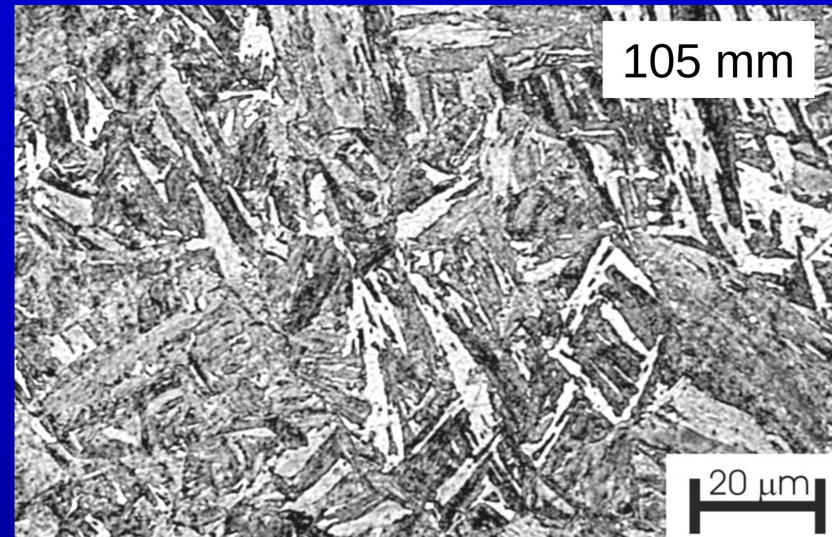
-  Charpy-V specs. (LT) 
- Rotating bending fatigue specimens (L)

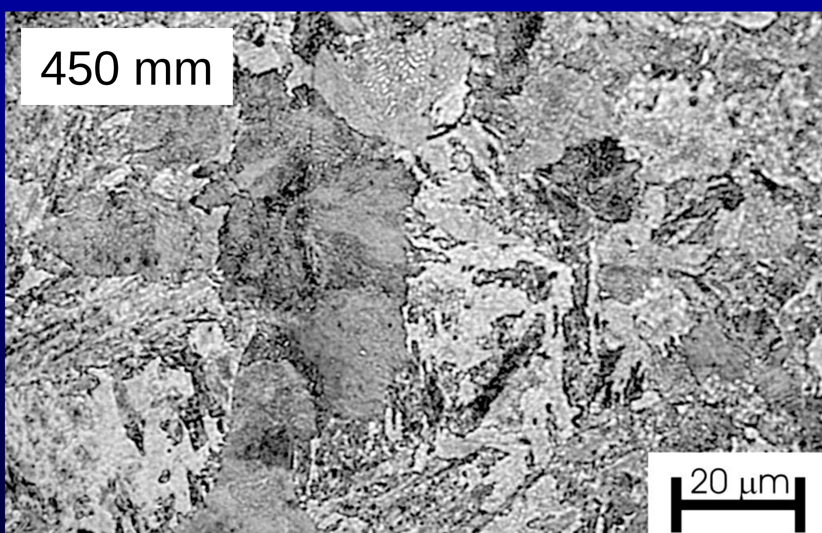
as-received or re-heat-treated

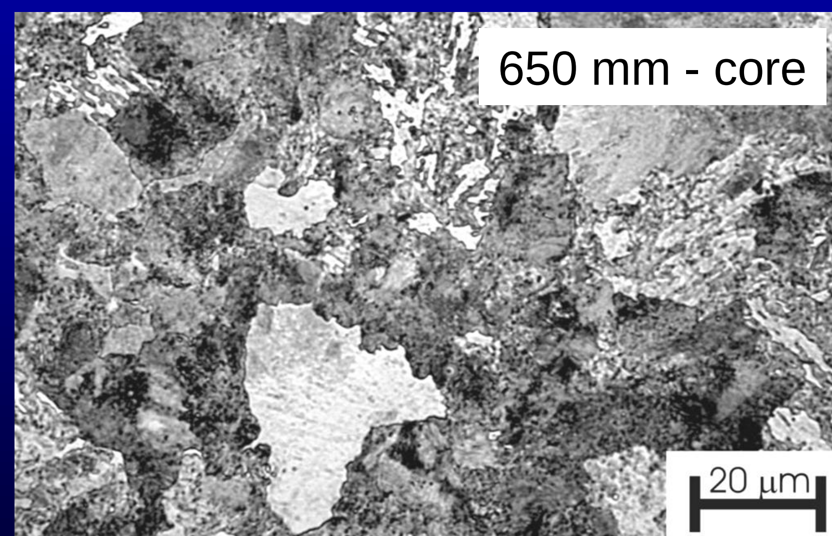
Re-heat-treatments: 860°C ¾h / N_2 or air / 590°C 3h / 550°C 3h

As-received microstructures vs. depth *(Nital etch)*

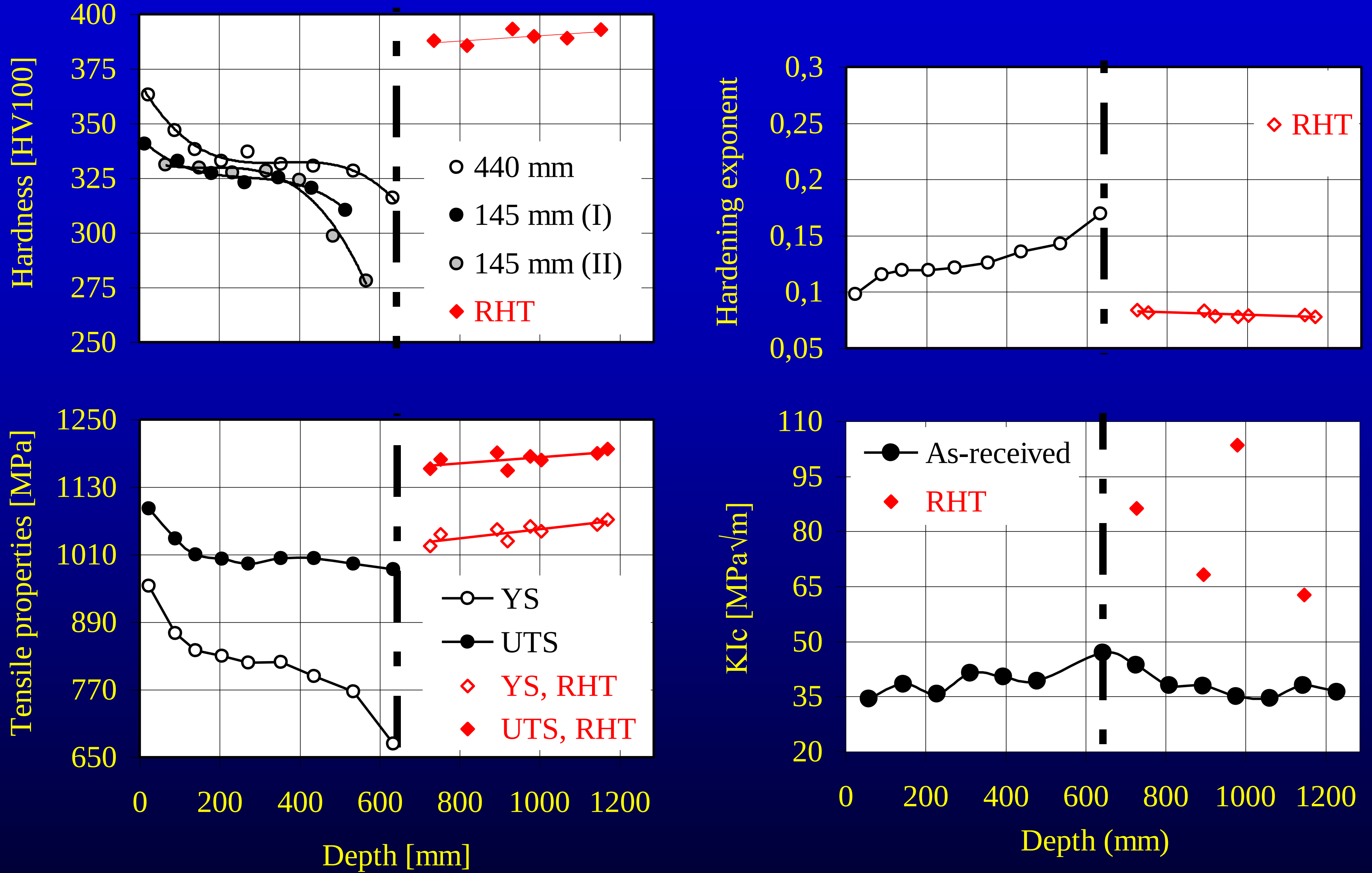




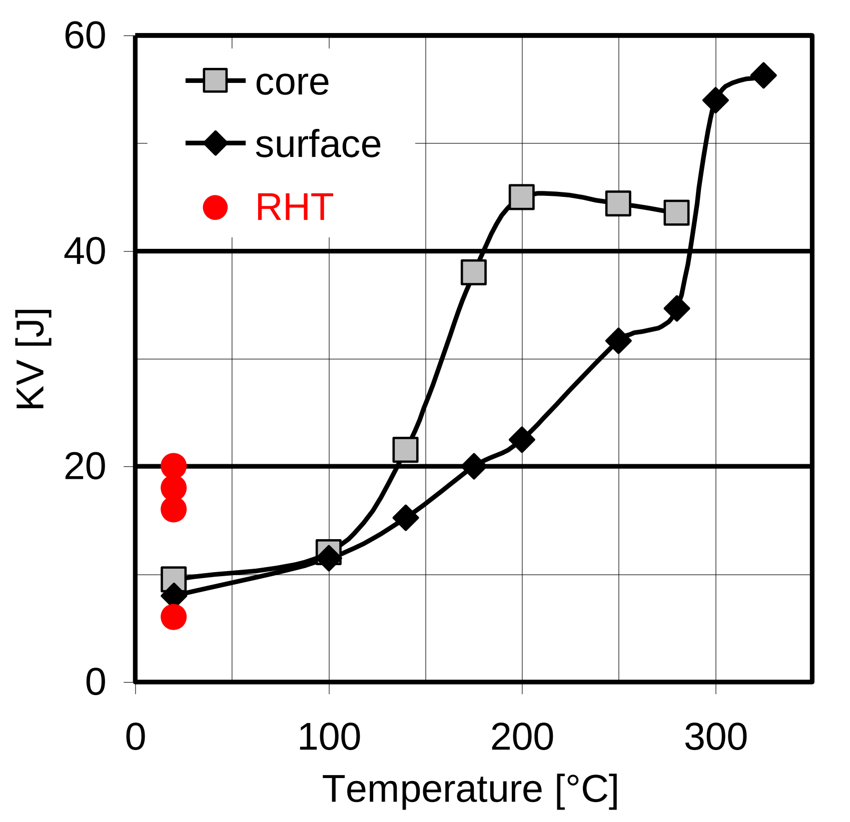




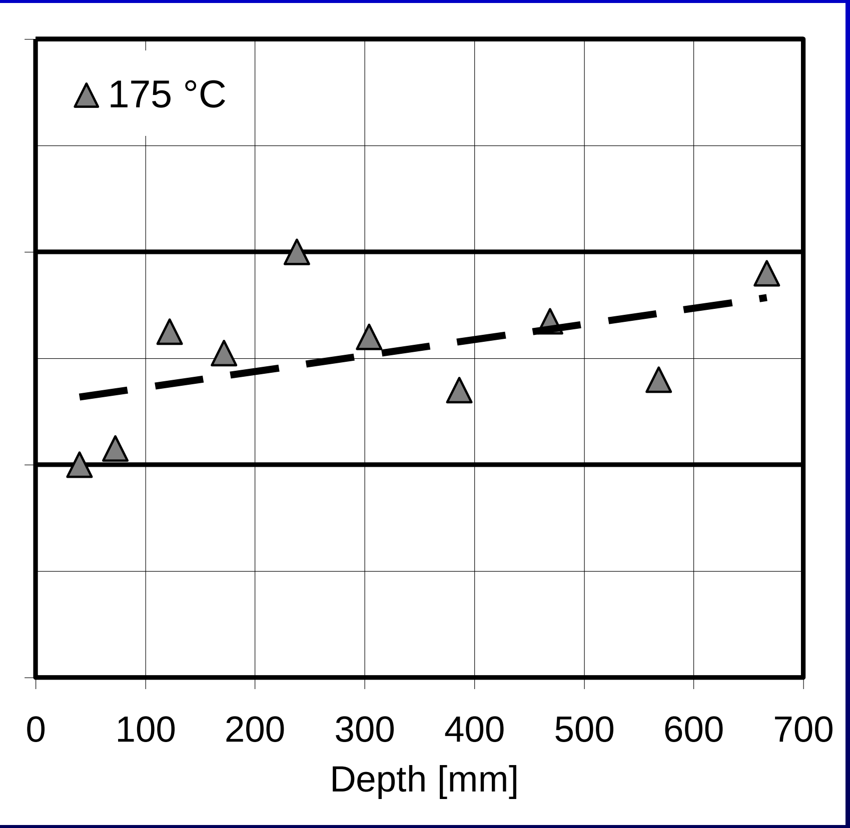
Hardness, tensile and fracture toughness tests



Transition curves



175 °C tests



As received steel

Rotating bending fatigue tests – 4.2 Mcycles endurance limit

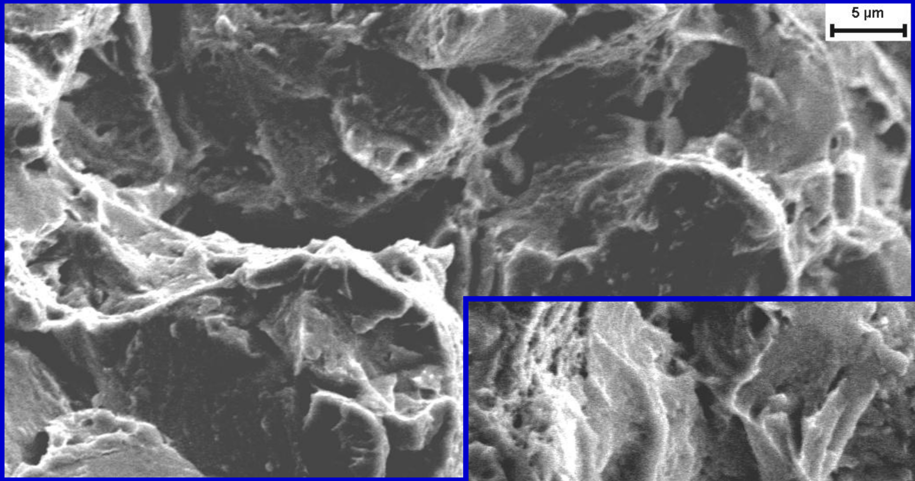
Staircase method (example below: core as-received specimens)

test n.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	X	0
[MPa]																	
500								X				X				2	0
490							O		X		O		X			2	2
480						O				O				X		1	2
470			X		O										O	1	2
460		O		O												0	2
450	O															0	1

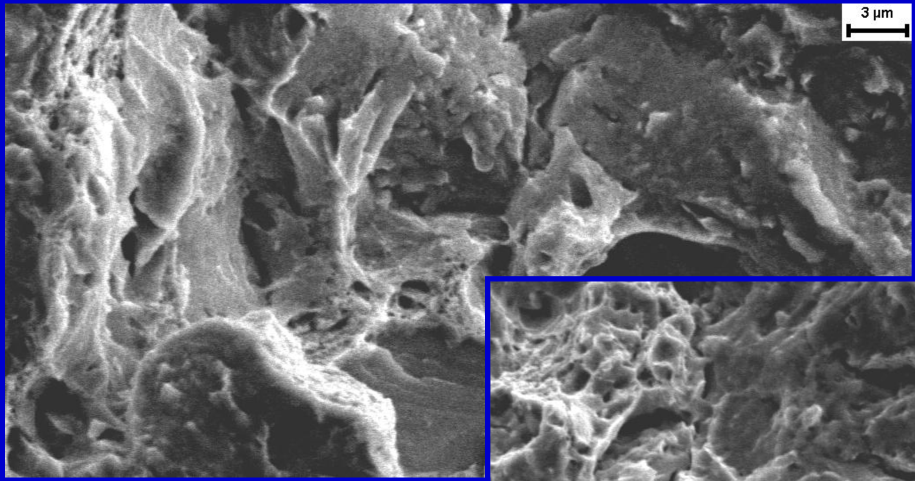
Survival Probability	Stress [MPa]			
	As-received		**Re-heat-treated**	
	Core (~560 mm)	**Surface (~140 mm)**	**Core (~560 mm)**	**Surface (~140 mm)**
10%	518	581	638	706
90%	469	537	577	694
50%	493 19	559 17	608 24	700 5

25% increase

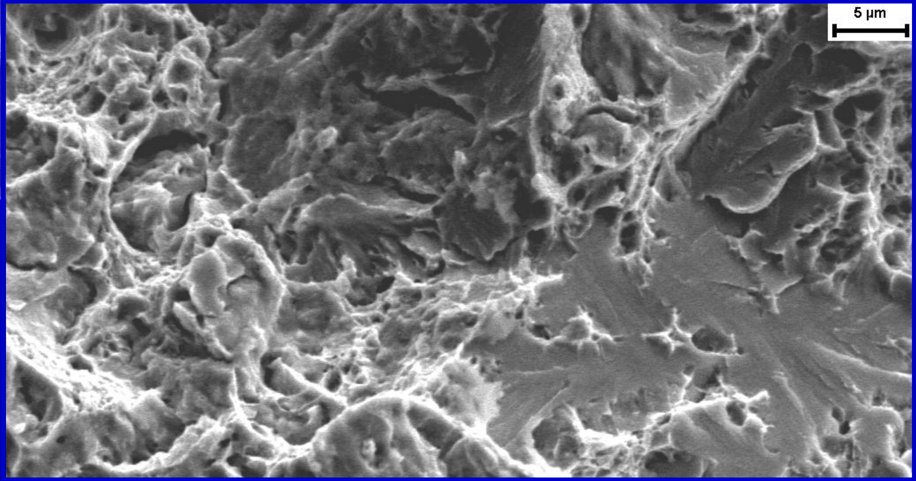
Fractography (I): Charpy-V test - brittle areas (as received specs.)



40 mm depth
intergranular

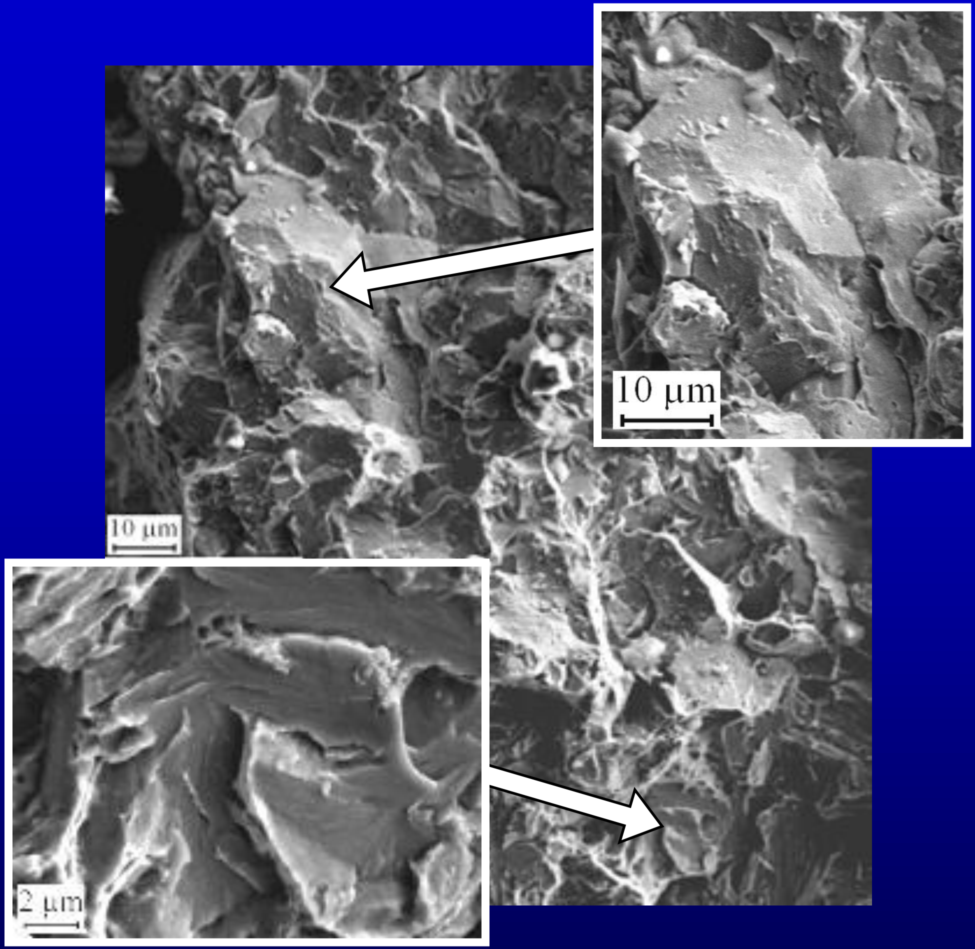


123 mm depth
intergranular & cleavage



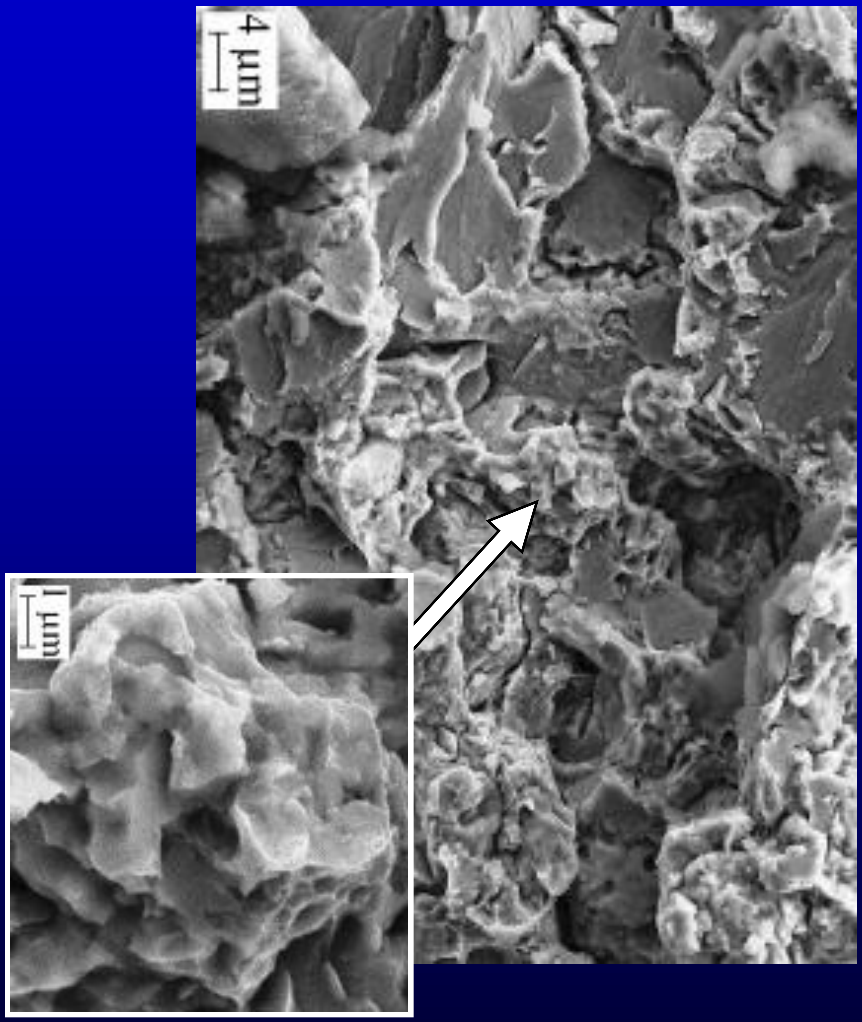
667 mm depth
quasi-cleavage & ductile areas

Fractography (II): K_{Ic} tests – as received specs.



60 mm depth – intergranular & cleavage

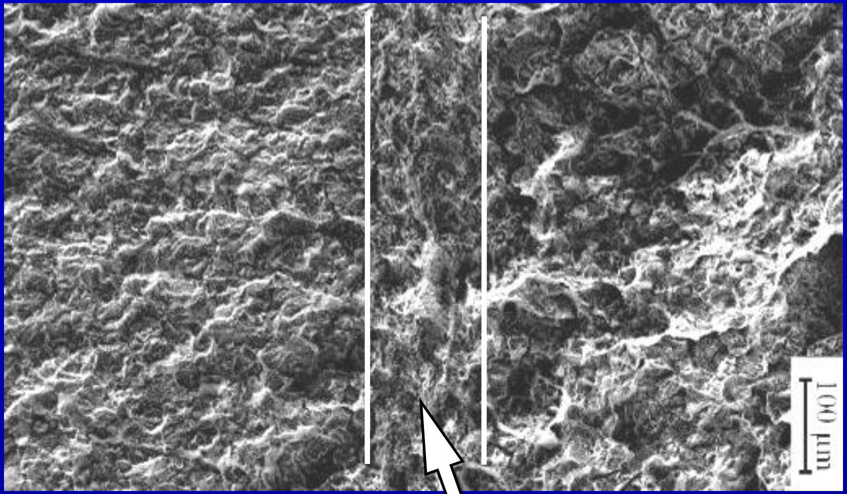
395 mm depth
cleavage & ductile areas

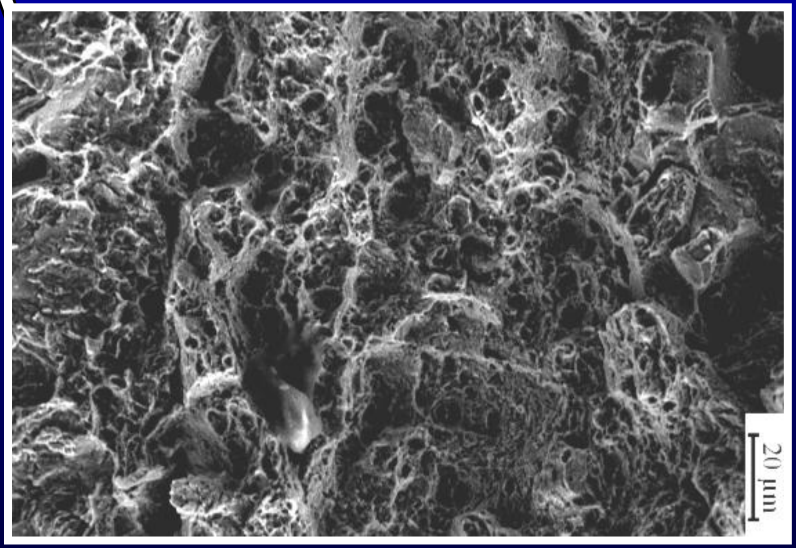


Fractography (III): K_{Ic} tests – re-heat-treated specs.

Fatigue precrack

Brittle propagation

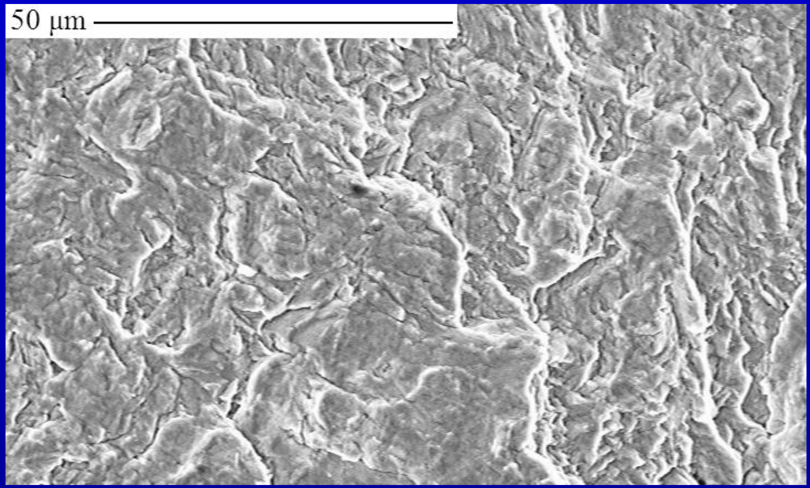


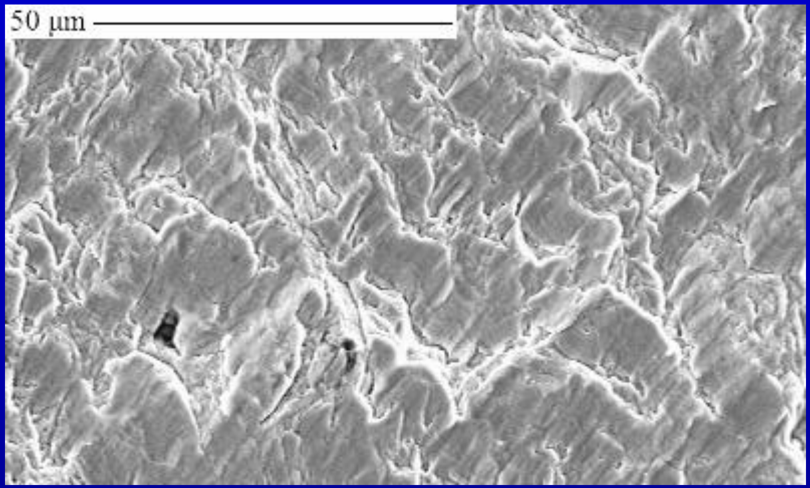


Fractography (IV): fatigue tests – fatigue areas

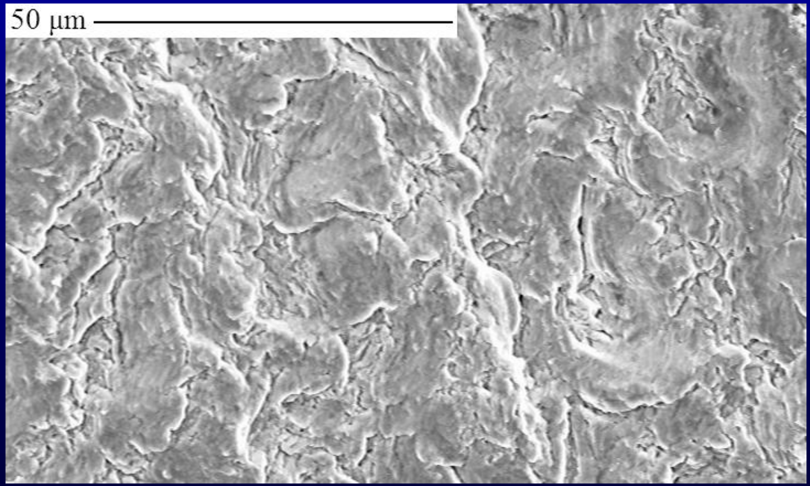
As-received | **Re-heat-treated**

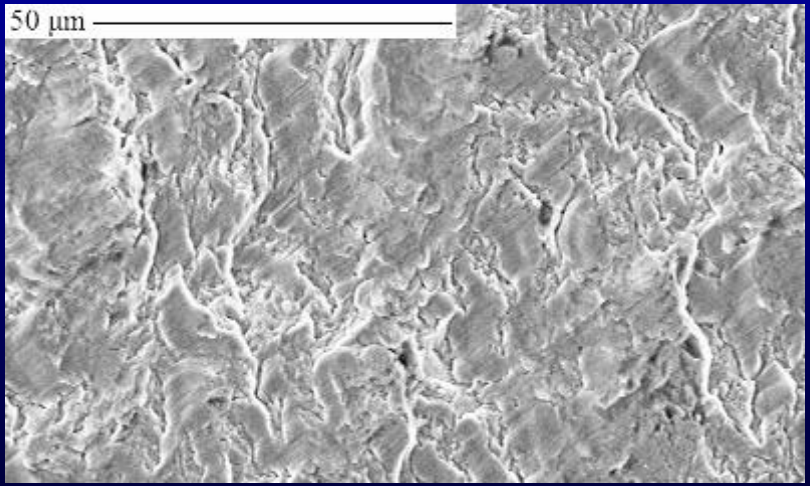
Surface (~140 mm)



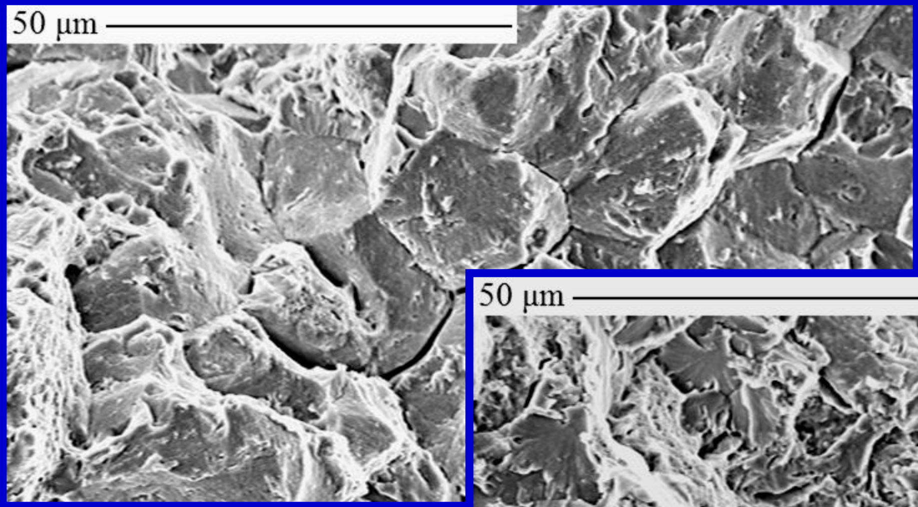


Core (~560 mm)

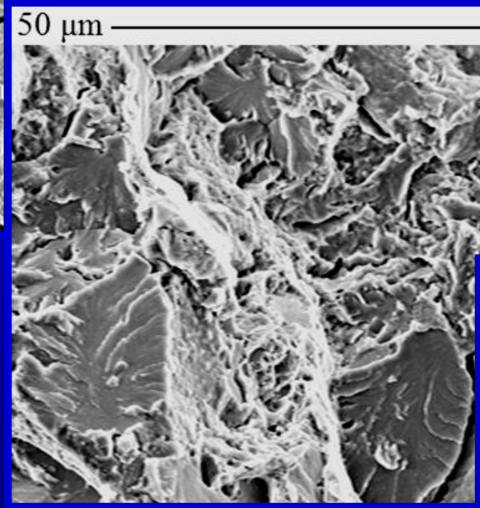




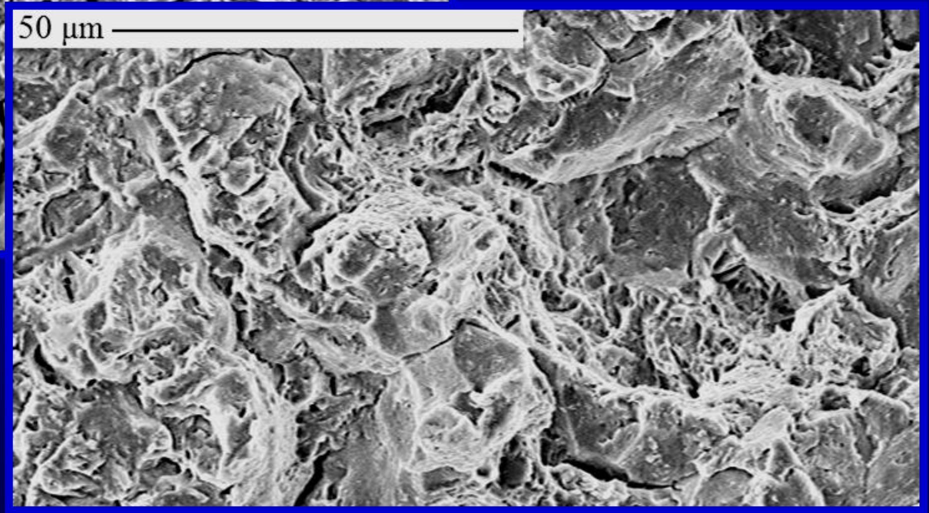
Fractography (V): fatigue tests – overload areas



Surface (~140 mm)
intergranular



Core (~560 mm)
cleavage & ductile



Re-heat-treated (originally ~560 mm)
intergranular (partially ductile)

Fractography (VI): remarks

Macroscopically brittle (overload) fracture mechanisms

- Charpy-V, K_{Ic} and fatigue test specimens with similar microstructures show similar microscopic fracture mechanisms.
- Core and intermediate depth as-received microstructures show cleavage or quasi-cleavage fracture with some ductile areas.
- Both as-received (low depth) and re-heat-treated tempered martensite microstructures show mainly intergranular fracture.

Toughness of tempered martensite microstructures

- Only the re-heat-treated samples show ductile regions at the crack tip of the K_{Ic} specs. (and thus higher toughness).
- Differences in the tempered martensite carbide distribution, not observable by the O.M., must be supposed.

Conclusions (I)

- Mixed microstructures occur throughout the examined bloom.
- The bloom fracture toughness is exceptionally low (about 40 MPa$\sqrt{m}$) for a Q&T steel, considering the achieved UTS.
- The plain-strain fracture prevalently occurs by decohesion, coherently with the fact that, at room temperature, this steel is in its brittle temperature range.
- The low toughness must be attributed to the microstructures caused by the heat treatment, and in turn to the large dimensions of the blooms and of the moulds.
- The much higher toughness of the re-heat-treated samples must be attributed to microstructural differences on a sub-micron scale.

Conclusions (II)

- The rotating bending fatigue endurance limits scale with the tensile strength, rather than with the fracture toughness.
- The endurance limits of the re-heat-treated samples is 25% higher, keeping the differences due to the original location.

- The low fracture toughness is a critical property; the lower fatigue endurance limit allows for a critical crack to develop more rapidly than in a fully Q&T condition.

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Thank you for your attention!